A Family of Monsters

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1868172.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Abigail Hobbs, Jack Crawford, Winston (Hannibal), Beverly Katz, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller, Alana Bloom
Additional Tags:	Vampires, Supernatural Elements, Blood Drinking, Bloodplay, Child Death, Character Death
Language:	English
Collections:	Murder Husbands Network
Stats:	Published: 2014-06-29 Words: 14,232 Chapters: 9/9

A Family of Monsters

by claritylore

Summary

Will's missing and now Hannibal isn't the only monster in town.

(Vampire AU from midway Season 1's final episode.) One for the Murder Husbands Network!

Notes

Sometimes I like to post stories as I go along and sometimes I like to netflix them out all at once. This one I thought would be best put out in one whack. Here's hoping it works!

PS: I'm going for the record for 'highest number of ears severed in a single fanfic'. How did I do, Guinness?

A Bouquet of Ears

"I last prepared this meal for my aunt Murasaki, under similarly unfortunate circumstances."

Jack Crawford's eyes were a scratch of diamond glass on dark mirrors and seemed to have been for weeks. "A loss," he said, his tone static.

Hannibal replied with a sharp nod. He wondered what form his grief would present itself in, should he allow it to rule him, as Crawford inelegantly seemed to. Truly, the sense of loss he bore beneath his breastbone, in a private cavern rarely touched, was a constant preoccupation. "We're mourning a death," he said, and took his first bite of his meal. It tasted oddly of ashes.

"Will's death is on me, not you," Crawford quickly intervened with his own bleeding sense of grief.

"It's on both of us."

A wild animal attack was the verdict, though it didn't satisfy anyone; not the FBI, not Hannibal or anyone else interested in Will's case. The orange prison jumpsuit Will had been wearing when he knocked out two prison guards and fled was discovered a few miles out, in the woods, torn to shreds, severely bloodied. There were no bones and no flesh to be found, and at first Hannibal had held out a small private hope that all was not as it seemed. Perhaps it was a ruse; perhaps Will had attempted a subterfuge and fled.

But the passing of time was cruel. Hannibal had begun to mourn, almost without realising it. He knew that something wasn't right, that Will had nowhere to go and that his encephalitis had been reaching a critical stage. And so one day he knew that he believed it to be true. Will had to be dead. Nothing had gone as he intended. An act of God, as random as they all were, had intervened and taken his friend from him. He could do nothing but admire its mercilessness and and rage against its senselessness at once.

"Only one of us will be convicted," Crawford remarked, sadly.

"You're not on trial."

"I will be, in the halls of the FBI. Already am." The morsel of food Hannibal had prepared trembled on the end of Crawford's fork, held aloft for far too long while he was lost in his thoughts. "He lost his mind on my watch. Then he escaped on my watch. His blood, and the blood of everyone he killed, is on my hands. I can't hardly stand it."

It was a rare thing indeed for Hannibal to eat one of his carefully prepared meals with so little relish. He had filled his time since Will's disappearance as best he could, with fine food, new patients and acts of murder. He still visited Abigail and Miriam when time permitted, checking that his surrogate daughter was following his instructions and properly caring for the incapacitated trainee. However he felt a lack of creativity permeating his being now, like

one deprived of a Muse. He felt Will's loss in a very expected way; like a personal slight, delivered by an unseen hand. It made his mercy towards Abigail pointless, since she had only been spared to gift to him when the time was right. It was all intensely dissatisfying.

Still, he persevered with normality and continued his courtship of the FBI and Jack Crawford specifically. Meals, phone conversations, whiskey by firelight, and all the rest. Fine, but held none of the spark of light he'd observed in the reflection of his face in Will's eyes.

The rituals of life were important in the face of death. Hannibal had learned that a long time ago.

He kept Will's twice weekly appointments open, sitting alone in his office at 7:30pm, listening to the silence of absence. It wasn't an act of commemoration, or anything so innately vulgar as that, it was all he could do to acknowledge the imprint of the loss on his own mind. How Will Graham had grown from curio to obsession over the course of their year together as friends, he could hardly fathom. But there it was.

After entertaining Jack Crawford to lunch, he had gone to his office to see to his appointments. At 7:30pm, he had sat in silence as always and sipped at a glass of wine, replaying old conversations with Will in his mind; conjuring his presence in the shadows. Then, at precisely 8:30pm, he closed his appointment book, as always, and smoothly put it away in the drawer. He ventured out into the waiting room, and almost tripped over the box that had been left out on the floor, right in front of the door to his office. It was flat and maroon, wrapped with a black bow, like a tray of chocolates left as a gift.

His nose was already able to discern that what was inside the box was not of the sweet variety. He smelled blood, faint but tangy, before he even moved to retrieve it. Options other than opening it were considered and dismissed by his curiosity; he wanted to know what was being gifted to him and by whom.

Five human ears. In a circle. With the dead head of a pressed rose at their centre on a bed of red satin.

In that first moment of irrational response, his hopes soared like a bird. But logic quickly asserted. It couldn't be a gift from a reappearing Will; a private note of understanding, or a promise of revenge for forcing him to ingest Abigail Hobbs' ear. There had to be a certain level of coincidence at play.

So then, what? Who would gift him with five ears? None of his present patients were of the type to be so creative. And Abigail no longer had that sort of fight in her, broken by fear and a need to please her captor in order to survive.

Hannibal decided that, with the absence of a note or any form of explanation, his best interests would be served by acting as any rational person would. He deliberately dropped the box and stepped away from it, drawing his phone from his pocket and calling Jack Crawford.

It was an unexpected end to his day, to have a second FBI crime scene put together at his office in as many months.

His home was stationed with a duty officer overnight in case the offering was some sort of threat to him, but the night proved uneventful. First thing in the morning, he paid a visit to the BSU to hear the forensics verdict.

Five ears, all from different victims, all bitten off. They had found no fingerprints or other DNA evidence that might allow for any sort of interpretation. They had matched up four of the victims on their DNA database and to people who had gone missing in the Baltimore area within the last week yet could find no discernible link between them.

Hannibal met with Alana for a coffee, since she was visiting the unit herself that day, and noted immediately that she seemed quite out of sorts. She smelled a great deal more flesh and blood than usual, as if her heart had been beating too fast for so long that the rushing of that ruby red life force in her veins had erased all trance of her usual perfumes and soaps. "Forgive me, are you well?" he asked, with all the old world politeness of his youth.

"Strange long night. The dogs were going nuts. I've never seen them like that." She sipped at her coffee, frowning. "They were almost feral, growling at the door and the windows. Winston got out."

He crooked an eyebrow, genuinely curious. "Oh? Did you pursue him?" That would explain the clear lack of sleep marring her normally pretty features.

She pursed her lips and avoided his eyes. "No. It felt... it felt like something was out there. I don't know what. But the dogs were reacting to it and I didn't feel safe going outside. Winston's probably just gone to Will's place. He does that."

"Even now?"

"Even now."

Hannibal watched her sipping at her beverage, his cold eyes turning warm. "I have no patients to see to today. We can go to Will's place together to check." The idea of returning to that place, where the echo of his friend still lived, was a balm to his very nature.

The idea seemed to buoy her equally. "I have one more class and then I'm free. Are you willing to hang around?"

He responded in the affirmative.

By the time they set off for the drive, he had mostly forgotten the mysterious box of ears. Alana clearly hadn't been informed of it, displaying no sense of knowledge to him whatsoever. It was easy to let it slide, for now.

Yet there, in the empty home that once contained the life and trappings of his most treasured friend, he couldn't help ponder it. He felt a chilling presence that didn't belong there somehow.

Hannibal stood at the foot of the empty bed and allowed his eyes to slide closed with the memory of the night he had pushed a tube into Will's stomach and pushed the ear inside. Will had been so good, his utter helplessness beautiful in the way he thought of art as beautiful. The vivid recollection of his tiny chokes and gurgles still wrenched something primal out of Hannibal's gut.

He had a great sense of some overarching pattern existing, just beyond his vision. Standing there, in the empty shell of Will's home, he could bring it nearer to focus, but it was still too obscure for any real discernment.

The missing dog was nowhere to be found, so he accompanied her back to her home and then made a show of performing a check of her security measures. Even if there had been nothing at all, it was a simple means of manipulation on his part, to continue the maintenance of her childlike trust in his good nature. It spoke to his ego to keep it going, just as any master of disguise finds satisfaction in a belief in his false appearance as truth by an onlooker.

Hannibal declined her offer of a joint dog walking expedition in favour of returning home to collect his thoughts.

He was entirely unsurprised when the call from Jack Crawford finally came, almost the moment he stepped over the threshold of his home. What he hadn't been expecting was to hear the word "bloodbath" in the same breath as "Will Graham" and it threw him off guard somewhat.

His drive to the crime scene was not one that could be described as leisurely.

Familiar Death

"Tell me I'm not seeing what I think I'm seeing,"

Hannibal pressed his handkerchief over his face a little more as he moved closer to the line of chained up corpses sat on chairs against the wall. The first was laid across the chair and had a hole where the lungs should have been. The second was upright and had six knives sticking out at the shoulders and through the torso, her head bowed, her hair falling like a waterfall. The third's face was split at the cheeks and the head opened up, the top half resting on the back of the chair, the tongue lolling. The fourth was burned into a black crisp. The fifth had a deep cut to the side of her neck, and the bowl at its feet contained one of her ears.

The other four had also lost an ear, prior to their mutilations.

"These are a simulation of Will Graham's crimes," he confirmed.

"Just what I didn't want to hear, Doctor," Crawford sighed. "Could Will still be alive? Could he have done this?"

Hannibal looked around the closed-down nightclub's basement, at the dozen or so overly rotted corpses dotted around the walls, at the rusted red of dried blood caking every surface, at the eight human-sized cages against one of the walls, two still containing chained up corpses, all stinking of urine and faeces, and a slab of stone like an altar in the centre, covered in blood and chains. "All of this?" he asked, with incredulity. He knew that Crawford had to share his impression that something far greater had occurred in this hidden away nightmare dungeon. It was hellish.

"We didn't release all the details of the copycat killings to the media. If it wasn't Will, it had to be someone close to the case to know all this."

"The other bodies, have they been identified?" Hannibal asked.

"The two in the cages have the same profile as the other five; both went missing downtown in the last week. Those two, and the five on the chairs are fresh. Nothing on the grey ones," Brian Zeller interjected. "They look like they've been dead at least six months or more. The consistency of the decomposition seems... unusual though."

The room lit up with flashes from Jimmy Price's camera as he crouched over one of the bodies and took some close up shots. "All the decomposed corpses are missing their hearts," he continued where Brian had left off. "They've all got the same punched-through hole in their chest cavity. They all also have wounds consistent with blunt trauma, like there was some kind of a fight prior to death."

"I'm pretty sure these lumps of flesh we're trying not to tread on are the hearts," Beverley Katz called from the opposite end of the room. "They've been stomped on. Crushed, like

someone was making fruit juice."

"A clear act of hatred," Hannibal observed, still speaking through his handkerchief. "The killer thought these people heartless." He pointed to the cages with his other hand. "There are eight cages. Two still hold their victims, and I would warrant that these five are also recent occupants, given the timeline of their disappearances..."

"That leaves one person missing," Jimmy jumped in.

"Precisely. Whoever that was perhaps wished to send a message, and used these five to do so."

An errant quote from William Blake floated into Hannibal's mind. *'A robin redbreast in a cage puts all heaven in a rage,'* he thought.

Crawford wore the usual half-lidded expression he always showed during moments of deduction. "Then we may be looking for someone else who disappeared from the Baltimore area sometime in the last seven to ten days."

"I'll head to base and start cross checking with Missing Persons," Zeller said, already packing up his forensics kit.

When it became clear that he had played his part as much as he could, Hannibal headed outside. The stench of unrefrigerated meat was too great to bear. The crime scene itself had given him no further clues as to what was going on, save to sprinkle a dark concern in his mind. A terrible 'what if', concerning the identity of the person who had been locked in one of those disgusting cages preoccupied his thoughts, simply wouldn't leave his thoughts.

Nothing made sense. For every connected hint of Will, there were many more to dissuade him of the notion of his personal involvement. That left a connected party of some description, privy to the case information, fanatical enough to attempt a crude reworking of that vision, despite the strange circumstances and the other bodies. All very odd.

It was quite late when he returned home, the edges of the sky tinged with red and fading fast into black. As he stepped out of his car and approached his front door, a rough growling sound caught his attention. Hannibal turned around, searching for its source.

He caught sight of an animal across the street, in the darkness between the streetlamps. It padded a little closer and its eyes looked like two red orbs in the dim night. Despite sensing a note of danger, Hannibal didn't move; he stared, curious, watching it approach.

When it finally came into the light at bottom of his drive, he was surprised to discover that it was a dog. One he recognised. "Good evening, Winston," he called, amicably.

The dog growled still more and barked viciously, face twisted in an unrecognisable grimace of demonic rage, white foam falling from his lips. Hannibal noted red stains on his fur around his mouth. The dog's body began to tense, as if preparing for attack, growing innately wolflike in that moment.

Hannibal crooked his head to one side, oddly frozen in the moment of uncertainty. The dog looked rabid and unhinged. All sense of time stopped in that odd few seconds of imminent danger.

Then a whistle pierced through the air from somewhere distant and the dog abruptly silenced. He followed Winston's gaze aside, down the road, to a figure hidden in shadows a long way down, framed by lamplight but not revealed by it. A second whistle sent the dog running down the pavement towards the stranger.

Hannibal moved down the drive, staring, trying to see. But the two of them seemed to fold into the shadows and vanish so quickly, he almost couldn't be sure if he'd seen anything at all.

It wasn't until he returned to his front door and attempted to open it with his keys that he noticed his hand was shaking.

Hunter and Prey

Despite the slight sense of caution that the incident with the ears inevitably fostered, Hannibal decided not to let it interfere with his plans for the following evening.

He'd tracked his prey through the park where he ran every Friday evening, waiting for the moment he knew he could strike without any fear of witnesses. The rude insurance salesman had been on his rolodex for a good eight months before finding the right recipe for him; that perfect inspiration for a good meal.

Hannibal lay in wait for an hour before grabbing him and dragging him into the bushes beside the pathway. The man was dead in the blink of an eye. All that was to be done was to gut him and remove his liver. The man wasn't worthy of an art display; he was just an evening meal and a means to release some pent up tension.

But as he cut into the body with the ease of a surgeon and took what he wanted, he felt eyes upon him. Hannibal kept vigilant watch and listened to the sounds around himself closely, as he always did, and detected nothing of concern in his vicinity. It was just an impression, like an itch on the back of his neck, that wouldn't go away. He felt... studied, somehow.

In the end, it was a quickly performed affair. He concealed the body in the undergrowth, unconcerned whether it would be discovered. Hannibal stored his prize in a sealed bag and left quietly and quickly, the impression of eyes following him all the way back to his car. It was curiously unsettling.

Thankfully the impression faded as he left and he soon forgot all about it, his mind refocusing onto his plan of action with regards to cooking the liver he had procured. He was able to have a faintly enjoyable evening of private dining, with Bach's Air on a G String for company.

But that was the night the dreams started.

As a rule, Hannibal did not dream much. He recalled incidents in his youth where he had been wracked with nightmares, but they'd faded and left nothing to replace them.

He was lying in his bed, slowing coming awake to the impression that someone was in the room. There was a smell in the air. Earth and blood, and something else that stung with familiarity. Hannibal became aware of a figure in the corner; hidden in the darkness, almost solid yet perhaps not quite. He couldn't pin it down in his vision.

"Who's there?" he tried to ask, but his voice had seized up. He realised in the same moment that he couldn't move.

Something was starting to growl in the far corner but he couldn't turn his head to see what it was. Hannibal pressed his eyes closed, concentrating on trying to move, telling himself; *'sleep paralysis... you must wake up... this isn't real'*.

Then a hand pressed over his eyes and he immediately knew it was. It was cold to the touch, the copper stench of blood overwhelming. Despite himself, Hannibal could feel his breaths coming in faster. The animal growling coming from aside was becoming a snarl, overwhelming, terrifying. It seemed to be whirling all around him.

"Shhh," a voice said through the blackness.

And suddenly, the hand was gone. The growling ended abruptly. cut off in a guillotine instant. Hannibal's eyes snapped open and he was surprised to see the room illuminated by daylight, so bright everything was bathed in a gaussian glow. The blood and dirt smell was replaced by the scent of flowers, and all around the room he saw enormous bouquets, as though he had woken in the midst of a wedding. Or a funeral.

He discovered he could move again and sat up to see more. His whole body felt light and not really there.

"Dr Lecter."

The sight of Will took his breath right away. He was standing in the doorway, smiling shyly, glowing along with everything else. Will looked sublime; blooming, like the flowers around him, all flowing brunette curls and fresh pink skin.

"Will?" he sighed. "What is happening here?" Hannibal climbed out of his bed and padded towards him, unsteadily, feeling as though he were floating. Everything felt transitory and unreal, as though he were having an out of body experience. "Will?"

He reached out and placed a hand on Will's arm, half expecting him to evaporate. But he was there and he felt solid and warm.

"Where have you been?" he whispered, awed to see him, dream or no.

Will's smile slowly dipped and faded away. "In the dark," he said, and seemed to float a little closer.

The room around them was elongating, growing beyond its normal proportions. Hannibal was surprised to feel Will's arms sliding around his ribs, gathering him into an embrace. He pressed his nose into the curls of Will's head, smelling the long lost scent of his friend, all heat and fire from his afflicted brain. "I wish this were real," he muttered, a very real sense of loss descending over him.

The flowers were dying, petals growing brown and falling from the stems around them, their scent fading into the fall scent of nature gripped by death. The bright light was finally fading. They reflecting Hannibal's change mood perfectly.

Will barked a laugh into his collarbone. "You won't," he said, moving so that his lips pressed to Hannibal's bare shoulder, then up the sensitive flesh of his neck.

The sharp pain was the last thing Hannibal remembered of the dream that disturbed him that night. He awoke that morning amidst twisted sheets, body heavy and sore. He moved to rub his eyes but realised they were sticky and wet, and started when he discovered that he was covered in blood.

He turned, knowing that he was not alone in his bed. There was a shape under the sheets beside him. It made his heart pound uncharacteristically.

"Will?" his mind ran ahead of his mouth. It couldn't be, he knew it, but nothing was making sense anymore.

Hannibal swept the sheets back in a snapped movement and discovered the gawking body of the insurance salesman lying beside him. It was enough to make him leap out of the bed.

He stood for a long moment, staring at it, a cold sinking feeling in his stomach. The impression of being watched had clearly been a gut warning. Someone was onto him and had achieved the impossible feat of bringing the leftover proceeds of his hunt into his home.

It felt like a message, though quite what it was supposed to tell him, he couldn't fathom.

Monsters In the Night

Hannibal had checked his whole house over and was only slightly relieved that there was no evidence anywhere to suggest an intruder. He double checked all his locks and then took a long hot shower to rid himself of the blood that had seeped onto his side of the bed.

It was all extremely irritating. Not only was his mattress and his bedsheets ruined, but he had a body to dispose of. Beyond that, he was feeling a deep sense of unease about his dream. Will's appearance felt like an omen, like he had seen a raven; a portent of death.

When he first looked in the mirror, he saw that his neck was bruised and marked with something that looked like a bite, but by the time his shower was done, it had faded away so much he felt like he had imagined what he'd seen before.

Hannibal took all the necessary steps to rid himself of the evidence of his kill before it was even breakfast time. He was experienced enough to know what to do to render the task a simple one. But his body really did feel sluggish and his muscles ached. He felt, for want of a better word, old.

His thoughts were preoccupied throughout the day. He couldn't stop wondering about what had happened to him in the night, about how real his dream might or might not have been, about the five ears, and about the crime scene he'd seen before that seemed somehow to be linked to Will's disappearance, and about the body in his bed. When he tried to recall what had been spoken about with his patients, he had barely a note to write, their conversations already lost in his memory.

The day went past him in a blur and he felt listless and vague. He checked in with Alana Bloom and found it interesting to learn that the dogs had settled and that the previous night hadn't brought the vague sense of approaching danger she'd been living with. Whatever had been stalking her in the shadows, causing the dogs to grow fiercely protective beyond their usual natures, was gone.

Perhaps it had switched its attentions.

A dark and strange suspicion was growing. If he let all sense of normality fall away, then the explanation for what was going on seemed that much clearer; Will had indeed returned. The deaths of the people from the cages and the retrieval of their ears were a message that he meant to have his revenge. The body in Hannibal's bed a signal that he was watching him. His dream had to be a product of his unconscious self scenting Will's presence.

He had never thought Will had the capacity for this level of theatricality, at least not without a great deal more direction, but something had to have happened to him. The question was what.

That night, Hannibal took great care to ensure that his house was fully secure. He even

locked his bedroom door, just for added measure. He thought about staying awake but curiosity got the better of him. And sure enough, it started again as it had before. Hannibal half woke to the scent of dirt and blood and the demonic growling, though this time he could see the wolf-shape in the corner where it was coming from, its two red eyes glowing in his direction.

He managed to wrestle a little more control this time, having been somewhat mentally prepared for this to happen. "Will?" he gurgled into the blackness. "Will?"

In a blinding flash, the room was filled with light and flowers again, and Will was there, this time standing by the window, looking out. Hannibal was released from the paralysis and able to move.

"You're here," he observed, this time making no move to leave his bed or approach the visage.

Will turned his head to him and the sadness in his eyes took Hannibal's breath away. "Am I?" he sighed.

"You sent a gift of ears, and you brought that body to me. Why?"

Will looked out of the window again, his thoughts seeming far away.

Hannibal saw that the world outside of his window was caught in a whirlwind of flames and brimstone. It illuminated Will's features in a fiery orange glow. "You desired to make me a monster. So here I am."

Will turned to him and his hands and arms were covered in blood. Even in the dreamy distortion of his bedroom, the red was vibrant and smelled coppery and it set Hannibal's jaw tightly. It also drew an odd tug of something unnameable out of him; that artist inside him who saw beauty in pain reveling in the sight of rolling red on his pale skin.

"Come to me," he said, wresting control of the dream. He slid his covers away and opened his arms and smiled as Will came to him, burying himself against Hannibal, once again so real and so warm in his arms. "I want to understand," Hannibal told him.

A flicker of something broke through the reality that was being presented to him, like a shattered mirror shedding a piece of its glass. Hannibal caught a glimpse into a dark room, that darkness so strong it contaminated the light they were bathed in. He saw a stone slab and Will chained on top of it, naked and bleeding from cuts all over his body, whimpering and shivering. But then the fissure was gone and Hannibal wasn't entirely sure of what he'd seen.

"You did this to me," Will whispered.

When Hannibal didn't say anything, unable to find the words to explain, he felt Will's hands slide to his neck and tighten. Hannibal tried to push him off but he was too strong by far. The startlingly bold eyes that bore into him were filled with ice and rage, and saw his own reflection in them as that of a corpse with his features.

Just at the point of blacking out, Hannibal's neck was released from Will's hands but replaced by the deep sting of his teeth. But by then he had no strength left to fight.

Hannibal was relieved to discover, when he awoke, that there was no body in his bed this time. The sense of unease remained, however.

Once again, his neck was a bruised mess. Close up in the mirror, he could discern that there was a bite at the centre. But by breakfast, the marks were almost faded again.

Though it seemed ridiculous, the faint thought he'd had before had taken shape in his mind. *'Vampire'*, he thought, with the awe due the most miraculous and absurd of contemplations.

Claimed

Hannibal considered himself a man of logic and reason. If not enlightened, then most certainly a puritan in relation to his own philosophies. His destructive whims were an act of self deification in a meaningless universe, with few constants beyond that impulse. He held no God in his heart save himself.

There was a certain logic to a universe which turned out both typhoid and swans in the same breath also creating real monsters alongside those hiding inside the skin of average men. That he'd never come across such a thing before did not render it out of the realms of possibility.

He cancelled two of his appointments that day, that lingering sense of fatigue defeating his desire to work, and instead returned to the the closed-down nightclub which had held the basement full of cages and bodies. Hannibal had to break in through a board at the rear entrance and then cut his way through the police tape in order to retrace his steps from earlier in the week, down into the basement.

While extensively cleaned, the scent of death still lingered. The bodies and the cages had been taken away as evidence, but the stone slab at the centre of the room remained. Hannibal ran a hand over it, conjuring the flash he'd seen of Will on its cold surface in his mind, trying to discern things.

He thought about the dozen corpses that had been strewn about the floor, their hearts removed and squashed. The science unit had stated that their rate of decomposition was unusual and far advanced of the other bodies. Something very strange was clearly at work.

Hannibal imagined that Will had been captured in the woods these people, and then bought to this room and caged. For some reason, he was kept there far longer than the others; two months, rather than the week or so the rest of the victims had been kept.

'Why were they here?' he wondered.

'Food,' his subconscious thoughts helpfully formed a response. It was an impulse he knew well, after all.

A strange scent presented itself to him with a slight air change. Death, unclean and tangy. Hannibal spun on his heels to catch whatever it was before it could catch him.

He was disarmed, momentarily, to discover a child half hiding from him behind one of the pillars. A little girl, in a dirty dress and an oversized hoodie. She started, eyes shining like a cat's in the dim light. He could tell she meant to run.

"Stop," he said, like a stern parent. "What are doing here?"

She wrinkled her nose at him. "I live here."

"I see," he said, even though he didn't. "In this neighbourhood?"

A little bolder, she shuffled a little closer and sniffed at the air. "Here."

Her movements reminded him of videos he had seen on abnormal development and its long term psychological effects. Though it wasn't pronounced, something wasn't quite right about the way she carried herself. "Right here?"

She nodded and wiped her nose with a doll she was carrying. Hannibal smelled the dried blood on it.

"Did you know the people who were found dead here?"

"Family."

In a flash she was no longer a child, but some crazed feral thing, leaping right off the ground towards him and throwing him down. Hannibal hit the ground hard, dazed. This creature was stronger than any normal child could be and he had no way to fight as she tore his collar away and pushed his head aside, clearly about to bite his neck.

Something stopped her at the moment of feeding and she sniffed him instead. "Claimed," she growled and leapt away.

Hannibal wasted no time. He rolled aside and used the momentum to propell himself up onto his feet quickly, regarding the dark shape scurrying around with more wariness. The last few notes of disbelief began to drain away. What she was was all too clear.

"What do you mean by claimed?"

"You're marked... by *him*."

"Who?"

She slid into a lit area, really close, grinning up at him. Hannibal's first instinct was to draw away but he did not want to appear in any way weak. "What do I get for telling?" she asked.

Hannibal regarded her for a moment, then, without taking his eyes away from her, removed his coat and jacket, and pulled the sleeve of his shirt upwards, He used a jagged part of the edge of the stone slab to stab a cut into his forarm and held it out, letting his blood dribble down. The child scurried beneath and drank it in, like a normal child would drink happily in the rain. He gave her a good fill before withdrawing the bribe, using a strip of his already ruined shirt to bandage it up and tutting at her whines of impatient protest.

"Tell me everything, from the start," he commanded.

Later that evening, Hannibal would find himself walking aimlessly and listlessly through his neighbourhood, wrestling with his thoughts. The feral vampire child, whose name he had

eventually coaxed out as Dinah, had confirmed his fears.

She had been part of a family of vampires, the ones who had been found preternaturally decomposed, their hearts removed and ground into the floor. Dinah spoke of Will with hushed tones of awe and fear. The man they found in the woods who tasted sweeter than any blood any of them had ever known, thanks to a brain disease which burned him up day and night. Unlike the usual humans they picked up, put into the cages and drank up fairly soon, he'd been rationed for months; the subject of several fights between family members even, as they all hungered for him. Dinah said that sometimes, those who drank his blood would share in the terrible visions he could conjure in his mind, like going on a drug trip.. She had watched him fight them even as he weakened, and had seen him wrestling with waking dreams and torturous nightmares, his mind boiling. She confirmed that, as he reached the brink of death, they had argued over whether to let him die or adopt him.

In the end, they had turned him into one of them, only to discover that Will was as abnormal in death as he had been in life. He took a terrible revenge, destroying them all by ripping their hearts out, one by one, with only his hand. Dinah didn't know why she had been spared, but he had let her run while he stomped those hearts to pieces, and then started to kill all the humans in the cages too. Now she lived in fear of him returning.

Dinah had seen the faint marks on Hannibal's neck and smelled Will's sweet burning scent on him. He didn't know how dangerous she really was, despite her tiny form, but knew he could take no chances. Hannibal had beckoned the child close and offered her a closer bite as a reward. Then he'd pulled her heart out, the same way Will had taken the hearts of her family, to satisfy his curiosity over how easy it would be with such a creature. It actually took some effort to get through the ribs, but he knew it was the best thing for her. A mercy, really

When her body hit the ground, she shriveled and decomposed into the corpse she had really been all along. Exactly as the rest of her family had done. Hannibal felt he had righted something cosmic by ending her, the last of the monsters who had stolen Will from him. For witnessing his dying breath, she could not be suffered to live. But Hannibal did at least take the time to bury her, with her doll.

Hannibal felt like he was in another strange dream as he drove home, knowing that Will had really been coming to him; that it had all been real, on some level. It made his heart soar, even as it clenched at the thought of Will's mortal death.

When he finally reached home it was with a lingering note of disappointment. If Dinah could appear to him like a living being, why then did Will insist on constructing dreams to interact with him? Now that he knew the visage was completely real, he wanted more.

As he bedded down that night, a little earlier than usual due to anticipation, he resolved to keep his wits about him and see just what he could do to bring Will back into his life, without forfeiting his own in return.

Impossible Things

Will was greatly displeased by the self inflicted wound to his arm, that much Hannibal could tell immediately. He watched the undead apparition of his friend breathe along the red curve, as a guest might breathe in the flavour of a complimentary wine before dinner, and then run his tongue up and down it, tasting the broken flesh.

The scene was so intimate, the two of them entangled on Hannibal's bed in a pool of hazy orange summer brightness. He almost couldn't bear to question it, lest it be snatched away. It was so peaceful in this odd construct of Will's making. In life Will had never wanted to reach out, though Hannibal had seen the longing to do so, to reciprocate his easy touches, buried in his eyes in certain private shielded moments. He couldn't yet quite fathom why he did so now.

"Why do you come to me like this, in dreams?" Hannibal asked and lightly let his fingers brush across the soft bare expanse of Will's back.

Will's strange eyes were cast aside, unable to fall on him. "Perhaps it's better than reality. Kinder." Hannibal gasped as he dragged a fang across the skin of his shoulder, all pretence about his nature now gone after Hannibal had acknowledged his vampiric status right at the outset. "I find it harder to hate you here," Will said, and then, slowly letting his cold eyes settle upwards, he continued, "I believe the same will be true of you."

Hannibal elected not to react further on the momentary infliction of pain on him to make a point. "If I wanted to make you a monster, as you claimed before, would I not prefer to see you in darkness? Wouldn't reality be better?"

That made Will smile and he showed more than a hint of a fang, the sheathed beast half glimpsed at last. It made the part of Hannibal that could only breathe when he was destroying and maiming others sing, finding beauty in the reflection of his own base nature. "You truly have no fear of death, do you?" Will sighed.

"Only boundless curiosity." Hannibal lay back, eyes distant in the dream. "Tell me Will, what would you have me do to earn my life?"

"Impossible things."

"What impossible things does an impossible creature dream about?" Hannibal dared to run his fingers through Will's hair and found the reaction curious; a stretch of the spine, like a pleased cat. He tensed as a sudden sting assaulted the tender flesh just above his nipple and realised that Will had used the movement to move his lips downwards along his breastbone. He had scratched a cut open with one of his fangs. The blood pooled at the wound and then dribbled down around the circular nub just below. It stung still further as Will fixed his mouth over both, drinking the blood but also tonguing his sensitive nipple head. It made Hannibal groan with want. As ever, the dream was almost as vivid as reality; perhaps a fusion of both,

even.

When that small cut had yielded all it could, Will moved upwards and bit into his chest at the apex between his collarbones, taking more of what he wanted. The deep boned feeling of being drained of something, not just blood, but life, swept over Hannibal quickly once again and he knew with every bite upwards that Will was going to take his fill once again.

"Let me live another night," he gasped, while he still could, "and I will give you an impossible gift tomorrow."

That made Will laugh. "You don't deserve to," he growled and bit into his neck viciously, quickly robbing Hannibal of his ability to fight back or even remain conscious through the assault, the light draining into the true darkness of their surroundings.

*

He woke with a start that morning and immediately felt like he had fallen down a mountain. Everything was sore, his head pounding, his limbs aching. Hannibal managed to stumble to his bathroom just in time to throw up and he couldn't help but shudder at the sight of his own reflection in the mirror. He looked about as close to death as anyone could without actually succumbing.

Hannibal had no energy whatsoever. Even if the wounds from his dream were faded things already, as they always seemed to be when inflicted by this supernatural being, he knew Will had meant for him to feel this way. He'd taken him to the brink in order to tell him, in no uncertain terms, that he could end his life at any moment. Will was still angry with him, that much was clear.

But he knew already how this would all mostly likely end. Death was a quaint certainty. Either he had to destroy this monster or he would be ended, one way or another. While Hannibal had no great fear of death as a concept, he had no particular desire to embrace it anytime soon. Not even for Will.

The pieces of the chessboard required movement if he were to have any chance of securing a checkmate. He called Abigail and asked her to come to him, clandestinely. It hadn't taken long to secure her obedience once she knew what he really was, all those months ago, standing in the kitchen where her father died. Though naturally headstrong, she had slipped right back into the survival technique of absolute acquiescence and he had thus become incarnated anew as her father himself. Abigail no longer questioned him on anything. Her fear lived in her very pores. Hannibal could taste it whenever he drew hear her like she were spoiled meat.

She would never deny him anything, but she was smart enough to be frightened half to death at the change of their established routine, sensing that something was going to happen. When she arrived that evening under cover of darkness, having taken far longer to get there than was strictly necessary, she was all heat and clammy skin.

Abigail half remarked on his own state of dishevelment, but caught herself. He made a

simple meal to share with her to calm her nerves, though his appetite was a very distant flag on the horizon, and sat her down in front of the fire for the evening. He engaged her in conversation about her father; slow words, told to the darkness, of the murders she had inspired and had been coerced into helping to shape. It was soothing and pertinent; as Abigail had been her first father's lure, so she was to be his this night.

She was yawning and hinting at a desire to sleep, though she was afraid to specifically ask to stay in his guest room, by the time he sensed something coming. The air started to slowly drain from the room. The heat of the fire caught and was swallowed whole before reaching them, rendering everything cold. The shadows groaned and stretched and he saw little huffs of Abigail's breath disappearing just beyond her lips.

"Hannibal, it's getting cold," she said with a shiver, and he allowed his gaze to show just a little of the anticipation thrumming through him.

"Abigail, do you at all care for me? As a father, who only wants the best for you?"

She gulped before she gave him the desired nod.

"And you would protect me from harm, just as I would protect you?"

Hannibal pushed himself to his feet and held his hand out to her. She averted her gaze as she muttered, "Of course," and placed her hand in his. Abigail allowed him to raise her out of her seat and lead her towards the shadows behind them. Reality was growing hazy around the edges.

Abigail jumped and folded into him as a deep growl sounded from the corner and two red dots appeared. "Oh god," he heard her gasp as she clung onto him, staring at it with wide eyes. "What the hell?"

"Good evening Winston," Hannibal offered, easily. He had known the mutt would come too, an eternal and demonic protector of his Master.

The name made Abigail tense even more, though if she had placed it, she said nothing. She was always a bright girl and Hannibal knew she would already be making connections.

Hannibal saw a figure looming in the darkness, a half glimpsed shape of a man. "Step into the light, Will," he commanded.

And so he did. Though his clothes were ill fitting and ragged in places, edged with dried tones of blood, his pale skin appeared like the surface of the moon and his wide eyes were mesmerising in shades of black-rimmed blue. He looked strange but radiant all the same.

A note of uncoiling joy slid down Hannibal's spine knowing that, at last, he was seeing Will in the flesh as he was now, not as Will wanted him to see him. He really was a sight for sore eyes.

"Abigail?" Will muttered, a solitary tear rolling down his cheek.

She was crying at the sight of him, a hand pressed over her mouth, though whether it was through surprise, relief, or fear, Hannibal couldn't say. He gently released her and stepped back, observing.

"I didn't know what else to do, so I just did what he told me," she whispered, stumbling closer to him, reaching out.

Will snarled and hid his face with his arm. "Don't look at me," he growled and slid back into the darkness surrounding them, rendering the edges of the room blurry.

"You asked for the impossible," Hannibal reminded him. "I too have raised the dead."

"Why did you keep her from me? Why...?"

"I wanted to surprise you." That was the honest response. He had always kept her alive with a view to gifting her to Will once he finally grew into his natural instincts as a killer; when he was ready to accept his place by Hannibal's side. This hadn't exactly been what he was intending, but he had no choice now but to improvise. "Will, she is our daughter. I had no choice but to conceal her or we would have had to give her up to the law, and to the baying mobs who would call her a monster."

Abigail's eyes were glassy with tears and memories.

"You can be her father again," he continued. "A place can be made in your world for her."

Will barked a horrid laugh. "In exchange for your own skin?"

Hannibal slid behind Abigail and cradled her in his arms, just lovingly enough for her not to see the small knife he had concealed for this moment. He slashed along the same line that marred her long neck and reopened the wound once made by her first father, holding her tightly as the blood began to spurt and she gasped in shock and pain.

"Take her, Will. Give her the new life she deserves."

She slid from his arms, but before she hit the ground Will was on her. Hannibal hadn't seen him like this, a wild crazed thing that smelled of death and life in equal measure, and it actually took him a little aback. There was no grace or finesse in the way he drank her blood down and tore at her throat with his teeth.

He waited just long enough for Abigail to grow very pale, and then quickly grabbed Will's wrist and slashed it with the same blade. "Feed her," he urged as he retreated. "Bring our child back to us."

Will's eyes were all ice and hatred and Hannibal held his breath. The scent of blood and pain was so feverish it drew pictures on the back of his eyelids. And before another word could be uttered, Hannibal's breath was arrested entirely by the pressure of two supernaturally strong hands clamped around his neck. He hit the ground hard, feeling the warm wet of spilled

blood on the back of his head. Without the ability to speak, to reason with the creature with Will's face, and severely weakened as he was, he knew he was in serious trouble.

The hands squeezed more and more, Will's eyes practically glowing with mania, forcing his own eyes to bulge and his blood to race. But just as he thought Will was going to snap his neck, the merciful darkness of unconscious came to his rescue.

The next thing he knew, he was being roughly thrown onto a softer surface which he quickly realised was his bed, and Will was tearing his clothes away in strips and pieces.

Consummation

"Our child, you called her," Hannibal heard Will growl through the haze of his raspy gasps for air. "So arrogant. You think you know what I am?"

Tears from being choked were still clouding Hannibal's ability to see fully but the dim shapes he could make out, head thrown aside as it was, were stretching and elongating. A set of antlers on his wall were growing in spirals out of all proportion and covering the entire area in a thicket. Hannibal tilted his head away in confusion and saw his headboard growing like a tree and leaning over them, reaching far higher than could be logically possible. The slats beneath the mattress were reaching out and bending upwards to create a ribcage like enclosure around them. The sheets of the bed were alive and writhing.

And over him, god, over him was a burning angel, its clothes melting away and rising as ashes, giving birth to a Will that nature and age could never have allowed to be. Hannibal didn't know if he was dreaming again or whether it was all real, but regardless, he knew he would never forget that vision of Phoenix-like beauty. It was like nothing he'd ever glimpsed before.

The way Will could walk into his mind and carve his senses to his liking was astonishing and enormously disconcerting. It was also intoxicating. He wondered whether death at the hands of something so powerful would feel innately greater and more worthwhile, somehow, than the usual briefly lamented ends of normal human lives.

"You think I'm the man you pretended to befriend? Your plaything? You sent him to his death. All that remains here is a suit of skin, worn by a monster."

"Not true," he croaked, and coughed to reopen his abused throat. Definitely not dreaming then, he thought, though Will was definitely inside his head and repainting the scenery to his liking, like a childish god throwing thunderbolts around. "You came... back... to me."

That simple truth dulled the fire around Will and he sagged a little, returning to the visage of pale nude flesh that lay beneath the illusions. "I did," he said, and kissed him more gently than seemed possible in the circumstances, all warmth and affection. Then he sat back up and punched Hannibal so hard across the jaw it jarred his neck. It made his neck an easy target for Will's teeth, and he bit in with a fervour, tasting his blood once again.

"Am I your Will?" he asked with red upon red stained lips, and hit him again, splitting his lip and partially dislodging a wisdom tooth. "This thing?"

Despite the hurt, Hannibal managed to meet his eyes. "More... than ever," he gasped.

Will gazed at him for a long moment, oddly awed. The wooden cage of slats curving around them groaned and closed in further, yawning and creaking. From the position he was in, they almost looked like wings stretching out of Will's back.

"And Abigail? Why did you keep her?"

"I kept her... for you." His throat was still convulsively closing but he had to get the words out. "I wanted her... to live. Wanted you... to have her back. Eternal... restored."

Will snorted and looked aside for a moment, lost in thought. "I swore... when I woke up like this... I swore I would never make another..." he sighed. He quickly shook himself out of his contemplation and turned back to Hannibal, grinning like the devil himself. "Very well."

Hannibal was surprised when Will pushed him upwards at his thighs and assaulted his perineum with his tongue. He winced as the side edge of a fang interfered and tensed when the tongue roamed downwards and shoved inside him, rudely.

His heels settled against the expanse of Will's back and dug in, almost involuntarily. "What... what are you doing?" he rasped.

Will pulled back a little and bit into his inner thigh. "If she is to be, some suffering must be had," he said, and licked at the blood drawn. Then he continued, "No child can be brought to life without blood and pain, without sacrifice."

"Ngh!" Hannibal grunted at the sensations that continued in his most intimate place. "What... do you want from me?"

"Everything. I want to take you, own you, hurt you, kill you." He bit into his flesh again, reveling in the pain it produced. "Ohh, you thought to hold so much power over me, Hannibal Lecter," the vampire spat his name and slowly began to carve lines of red along his thighs and buttocks with his unnaturally sharp nails. "I was half dead when they found me. Burning. Now I can never cease to burn. I'm not like the ones who made me... and I don't know what I am. All I know is that you are to blame. You did it all."

Will placed Hannibal's hands above his head and pinned them down for the crawling, writhing sheets to slither in like snakes, wrapping around his wrists to hold him fast.

"Is this your... revenge?" Hannibal asked. He wondered if Will could hear the steady rhythm of his heartbeat, unaffected as it was by this turn of events. Could he hear the rush of his blood, surging downwards at the thought of what might be in store? Could he scent his arousal, just as Hannibal could his?

Will leaned over him and nibbled at his collarbone. "I know what it is to be loved by a monster. This is... even stevens." At last, he plunged his fangs into Hannibal's neck over rapidly forming bruises and sucked in a few mouthfuls of red hot liquid life.

"Nnno...," Hannibal groaned, weakly. "I want..."

"What? What do you want?" Lingering over him, Will's eyes were like empty pools of shimmering water, stark in contrast with all the red.

"No more illusions."

Will licked at the shell of his ear. Then, in barely a flash, like melting paint, the scene he had been presented with melted away. The ribcage around them was gone, and the bedroom

looked static and dull without all the surreal visions that had appeared to be there mere seconds before. But before Hannibal could really react, he couldn't help but roar out in pain as his ear was suddenly torn right off in Will's teeth.

With his hands freed from the imaginary bindings, Hannibal clasped one to the hole where his ear had been. He glared at the vampiric figure of Will, who now sat atop his hips, chewing merrily and making a show of licking his fingers. "This is reality," he said and swallowed. "Oh don't look so wounded. You must concede, you deserved that."

Hannibal recalled the care with which had taken Abigail's ear; he'd put her under anesthetic and cut it away with a scalpel. He'd cared for the incision to allow it to heal quickly and cleanly. It had been done with purpose, not malice. This was certainly not a deserved retribution.

There was no time to react any further to the sudden mutilation, as Will was suddenly opening him with rough fingers, warmed only with blood. He huffed breaths in and out, unused to acquiescing in this way. Hannibal attempted to make no answering sounds, uncertain of what to do.

Eventually, his mind was too much of a whirl to remain silent. "Will Abigail live?" He couldn't be sure, but he didn't think Will had drained her before his attentions had turned to him.

Will was looming over him, easing himself inside Hannibal with a snap of the hips and a hissed growl. Once fully sheathed, Hannibal hooked his legs around his back and made an effort to relax at the intrusion. For a long moment they lay in each other's arms, trembling, like normal lovers. Hannibal closed his eyes and breathed in the familiar essence of Will, a scent he knew better than any other in the world, and felt soothed.

"If we create her, she will thrive," Will whispered and kissed him, scraping his tongue with his teeth and letting more of the copper red taste bloom between them.

Hannibal came to understand his meaning only when the first slow thrust deep into him made his toes curl with both pain and unexpected pleasure. It was a symbolic joining, like the consummation of a marriage. Will had no intention of being a single parent. As she had always been theirs, together, in life, so he was recreating her as theirs in her future unlife, in the age old way; a symbolic impregnation.

Just as he knew that he was bringing Abigail back to life in submitting to Will in this way, Hannibal knew with absolute certainty that he was not merely going to die, as Will had implied to him repeatedly since his return. He would indeed be reborn as well. Will loved him just as much as he hated him. These visitations were not his revenge, they were towards a greater purpose.

Once, he had looked on Will as the unmoulded clay of his future companion in life. It seemed that the tables had been reversed, and now it was his turn to be transformed.

The sensations Will aroused in him were different to any he'd experienced before. They were intense and heavy with the promise of greater heights. The pain in the side of his head and in

his neck began to float at a point above him, just out of reach, leaving all of his nerve endings free to respond to the pleasure being wrung out. His hands gripped onto the strong back, rippling with muscle under his palms, anchoring him. He was burning at Will's touch, cold though it was, keening and moaning into an eagerly responding mouth.

All pain was lost in the exquisite sensation of Will's driving pounding ownership over his body. Even when his hands were pushed above his head against the pillows, and he felt the bones in his wrists give way in the supernaturally strong grip, his cries were not out of pain. He was on another level of consciousness altogether; a place beyond even the high of the hunt, or the satisfaction of serving the flesh of his kills to high society pretenders.

The room suddenly span upsidedown and Hannibal couldn't draw breath, and he was coming and coming, and Will was pouring coldness like ice into his body and tearing into his neck and yet still he was coming and coming and crying out, half begging for more, shaking from head to toe, desperately clinging onto him, eyes rolling up into his head and plunging him, freefalling, downwards into blissful darkness.

Changelings

Hannibal coughed and spluttered as cool liquid flooded his mouth and yet he drank it down, eagerly. He couldn't quite bring himself to fully awaken, everything was in too much of a haze, so he just did what he needed to do to get as much water as he could before collapsing back onto his pillow, amidst the twisted and bloody sheets.

He was floating in and out of consciousness, all sense of time and place departing him. The thought that he was still alive flickered in his confused mind and bounced around, in and out of reach. It was hard to make sense of anything except that every part of him was hurting, his broken wrists especially.

Someone was there in the room with him sometimes, that much he could discern. But they said nothing and he didn't have the strength to open his eyes and see who it was. All Hannibal wanted to do was lie still and drift away from the pain.

Eventually, the dim sound of his doorbell, distant and vague, tore him from his reverie to some degree. The consideration that he had a visitor brought him back to awareness, though he had no way to respond to the summoning sound. He supposed whoever it was would simply have to go away but, moments later, he heard a voice.

"Hannibal?" it called from downstairs. "Are you here?"

Alana Bloom. He didn't know why she had come, or how she had gained entry into his house, but he offered up a silent prayer to the law of averages that she would venture no further than downstairs and leave, assuming he was out.

"Hannibal?" her voice continued. "I've been calling but no answer. Getting worried here... Hannibal?"

He heard something else then, something nearer. A smashing sound, like dropped glass, somewhere beyond the boundaries of his bedroom but not so far away as downstairs; perhaps from the landing.

All too soon, he heard the creak of footsteps slowly ascending, cautiously.

He willed Alana to leave him alon but knew that it was futile. If she was coming to look upstairs, to investigate the source of the sound, chances were she would take her chance to peak inside. He was hardly able to cover his nakedness, and certainly not able to hide. Hannibal braced himself for acid of humiliation, to be seen like this, so helpless and weak.

At last he cracked his bruised eyes open and blinked away the crusty blur of sleep, staring at the Japanese armour display just outside the open door, waiting.

"Hannibal, are you okay?" he heard Alana call, again, much closer, and he inwardly groaned.

Predictably, when she strayed to the entrance of the bedroom and caught sight of him, she ran over to him with a look of horror. "Oh god, Hannibal?" she was gasping in a panic, the hand which pressed against his forehead making him flinch in pain. "What... who did this to you?"

He guessed she had spotted his missing ear.

"Alana?" a delicate female voice called, making the figure beside him whirl around in surprise.

There was a long pause, pregnant with surprise. "Abigail?" Alana gasped.

Hannibal watched the scene unfold through one half-lidded eye. Abigail looked well, her eyes sparkling was a smile that looked pleasant at first glance, but held promise of something dangerous just beneath the surface on closer inspection. He was buoyed to see that her missing ear had been returned and the scar on her neck completely healed.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you," Abigail said, inching closer to them. "Don't be upset with Hannibal. He was trying to protect me."

"Protect you?" Alana asked. She sounded like someone whose entire worldview was being demolished, brick by brick. Hannibal almost felt sorry for her, though he found he was enjoying watching the moment unfold.

"I killed Nicholas Boyle. And I helped my father, you know, with all those girls. I chose them. I lured them to him." Gone was the fearful, uncertain and guilt-ridden young girl Hannibal had been sheltering; this Abigail seemed quite affected by her past actions. She laughed as she held her hands out to Alana and smiled, like a magician showing off a party trick. "Surprise, I guess."

Abigail took hold of Alana's hands and whirled her to her feet, playfully.

"Did... did you do this to Hannibal?" Alana asked, breathlessly.

The young monster looked over to him and tilted her head. "No. That was Will."

"Will? He's al..."

"Shhh," Abigail said, placing her finger over Alana's lips. "You really do overthink things. Does it matter?" She grinned like a small child, in a way he'd never seen her smile when she had been alive. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

Hannibal could smell the tangy fear spiking up along Alana's skin and practically hear her heartbeat speeding up. "We need to take Hannibal to a hospital," Alana told Abigail, in an authoritative tone of voice that couldn't quite hide the tremble behind it. She knew something was not right.

It was all quite predictable really and Hannibal hardly needed to keep his eyes open. The

sweet young girl fell away with the ease of a mask and the fangs appeared, smooth and sharp. Alana was just a warm lump on the bed beside him in a matter of seconds.

"I'm glad you're awake Hannibal," Abigail said, and he made an effort to open his watery eyes again. "It's been a few days. I've tried to keep you hydrated. I wanted you to be aware. Can you speak?"

"Alana..." he coughed.

"Just a little taste. She's not dead. Not yet." Abigail held her by the scruff of her neck and dragged her to the foot of the bed with barely any effort. She was strong like Will now. "I'm saving her."

"For?"

Abigail shrugged. "Will gave you to me. The choice, I mean. He said it should be my choice whether you live or die, given all you did to me."

"Ah." Hannibal coughed and didn't hide his wince of pain at the effort.

She hummed as she sat down beside him and caressed his cheek. "I see and understand so much more now. It's like I have new eyes. I understand you in ways I never did before." Abigail poked a finger against the jagged hole where his ear had been, smiling at his responding groan. "I killed Miriam, by the way. I felt bad for her. You can be very cruel, Hannibal."

He didn't have the ability to say anything in his own defence anymore. His body had just about had enough and he contemplated drifting back to sleep to escape. But when he allowed his eyes to slide closed, Abigail slapped him across the face to prevent it.

"This is important," she hissed. "Stay awake." Abigail held squeezed her fingers around his chin, holding his head up. "You told Will you always planned for us to be reunited, all of us together. Was that true?"

Hannibal swallowed, hard. "Yes."

"So... you *were* protecting me?"

"I was."

She let his head slide back to the soft embrace of the red stained pillow and stared aside, towards the drawn curtains that were blocking out all but the dimmest echoes of daylight outside. "I thought you were going to kill me and eat me, like the others," she said, and then laughed. "I thought it was all a lie. The promises you made before I figured you out... to keep me safe. To be better for me than my father was. You hugged me in Minnesota, in my old house, and you promised me a new life... I didn't think it would be this."

Alana groaned, half coming back to awareness, her face hidden by the dark falls of her

messed-up hair. Neither of them paid her any attention.

"It's funny, really," Abigail continued, "Will is as strange he ever was. And I don't feel too different at all. Stronger, and less afraid, but still me." She smiled as her eyes met Hannibal's. "But I do wonder about you. Will you become a worse man than you are now? Is that even possible?" She smoothed his sweaty hair, away from his forehead, leaving him no place to hide. "Will was afraid to make the choice I am going to make. But... you're my father now, for better or for worse."

"We both are," he struggled to tell her, needing her to understand.

"Yes. And Will needs you too." Her eyes began to blaze in tones of cold moon-blue and she let him see her fangs. "I have decided to change you, as Will changed me. I want you with us."

Hannibal felt a lurch in his stomach at the thought. He still did not want to die, not really, but his choices had tapered down to a very small point indeed. He contemplated asking her not to go through with it, knowing she might do as he asked, and in the last seconds left to him, he tried to imagine a scenario where he slowly recovered from his injuries and never saw either Will or Abigail again. It was a lonely life, however he tried to spin it. He'd only just got Will back, and the thought of giving him up again touched the last hidden away soft part of him profoundly.

So in the end, he said nothing; he made no plea for clemency. He bared his neck, took a final breath, and embraced what was to come.

The Becoming

It was a curious thing for a man who had always been deeply aware of the limitations of his physical form, who had spent long hours honing it into the body of a predator, to learn that the very air itself reacted to him with fear. Nature, with all its reaching branches and bacteria forming connections, shied from him wherever he went. He fancied it had always been so, only he didn't have the tools to see it before. Now he could see, hear, smell it; the endless fear and repulsion of the natural world to his unnatural life.

Hannibal had always felt that the mystical figure of God, were He to exist, would be beyond measure in wanton malice and matchless in his irony. For a man such as he to become what he was now seemed to be the ultimate active proof of this supposition.

As Abigail had told him, the change had little effect on his thoughts and views. It merely magnified his most ingrained and powerful traits. She had grown hotly manipulative, her ability to direct the thoughts of others to her own wants faintly hypnotic, to the degree he hadn't had to kill Alana Bloom in the end, she had laid down to him at Abigail's urging and given her life over. Hannibal too knew he had gained in that aspect, but he had also grown in strength and speed and physical prowess. His teeth were sharper, so much sharper, and his thirst for blood so much more vigorous than hers. She was a formlet still in some ways, while he was stronger; he was darkness itself.

Whatever unique neural pathways that had given Will his extraordinary cognitive and empathetic abilities in life had clearly also remained, bestowing mental powers beyond anything Hannibal or Abigail could claim. That much he had learned from what she told him of her observations of him, and neither of them had the same ability to project into the minds of others, to carve their own reality into the ashes of dreams. Hannibal deduced that the boundless guilt that had always plagued his friend before, borne out of a lifetime of reliving events through the eyes of others, had likely remained with him as well. Why else would he hate to consider himself a monster, when Hannibal and Abigail embraced their natures so easily?

Why else would he run?

Hannibal caught up with him in the woods near to Alana's home. Or, more accurately, that was where he came across Winston, his snout dripping with blood, the torn apart carcus of a deer at his feet. The dog looked quite gorged and alive and very, very dangerous.

There was a tense moment, two predators staring one another down, but Winston soon acquiesced to him, recognising the superiority of this alpha predator. The red-eyed hound dipped his head and turned heel, leading Hannibal past the house, towards Will.

It was hard to really describe how he knew where Will was, no matter where the man was, or how far apart they were. All Hannibal needed to do was press his eyes closed and focus on the tug at the core of his being to know where to go. He was reasonably certain that it was a

bond unique to them; the everpresent silent call of his soulmate, for want of a better word.

Will knew where he was too. He could tell by the way he had kept on the move ever since Hannibal came to find him. Finally, he was resigned to the inevitability of facing the monster he created.

Hannibal found him up in the trees, resting on a thick branch, staring over in the direction of Alana's empty little house. "They took the dogs," he said, knowing exactly who was standing below him, "I guess, since there's no sign of her, they had to go to kennels."

"No doubt they will be well cared for," Hannibal remarked.

Will lay down on the branch and look over the side, down at the man standing below. "Death suits you," he said, with a sullen little smile. "I might have known." Will sat back up and stared up at the sky, eyes closed, listening to the sounds of the forest, centering himself.

Hannibal waited for further acknowledgment, but none was forthcoming. So he let his claws out and climbed the tree, enjoying the ease and grace that now belonged to him, allowing him to scale its height as if he weighed nothing. He seated himself behind Will on the branch and, when the man made no further attempts to get away from him, shuffled in behind him and ventured to put his arms around his waist, burying his nose in the familiar curls.

To his relief, he felt Will relax in his arms and sink back against him. "You haven't fed since last we met," Hannibal said, sensing it somehow in the frailty of his form.

"You should be dead," Will said, his angry growl too languid to be convincing. "You deserve to be."

"Perhaps. Yet you gave this option to Abigail, knowing exactly what she would do." Hannibal rubbed his cheek against apex of Will's shoulder, affection blooming in him like blood from a gunshot wound.

Will sighed, deeply. "I'm so tired," he murmured, "of this, of everything."

"Understandable. But you're not alone anymore," Hannibal said, into the shell of his ear. "Let the weight of all that mortal guilt fly away. We're beyond that now. We're so much greater than that."

"I hated you," Will said, now staring off into his memories, "when I woke up in that place, in a cage, my brain melting. I knew it was you, the copycat killer. I knew you set me up. I raged for your blood as they drank mine. I killed every single one of those vampires who took me, and then I killed the innocent people they had imprisoned too. I enjoyed it."

Hannibal recalled the grisly scene he had been called to by Jack Crawford, the nightclub basement where all those dead corpses had been posed in the manner of the copycat victims; a public note aimed at him alone. There was no way to soften the fact that Will was a stone cold killer now, following a nature Hannibal knew had always been buried within him, even in life.

They were so very much alike.

"You sublimated your guilt in exacting revenge on me."

"But I couldn't kill you."

"No. So we shall be killers together." Hannibal kissed his neck, gently. "We will provide for our daughter and never be parted again. Never."

Will hummed in his throat, leaning ever more into Hannibal's touch. He didn't protest when Hannibal gathered him close and pulled him off the tree branch, landing gracefully on his feet with Will in his arms.

With a sly smile, Will waved a hand aside and a trail of crimson flowers appeared at their feet, stretching out towards the house like a red carpet. Antlers, flecked with blood and guts, grew out of the soil either side and made the created walkway even clearer. Hannibal shook his head, fondly, at the gentle intrusion into his mind, unable to complain in the serenity of the moment. He followed the path laid out for them towards the house. Will was already grazing his fangs against his collarbone with the promise of more.

A red mist haze of lust and desire settled over Hannibal and he moved quicker than the human eye could see to close the distance to the house. Nature itself feared him and he in turn could tear up its laws on a whim. In his formative life, he might have deemed it hideously inappropriate to sully the home of a recently departed friend, but it seemed fitting somehow in this case. After all, Alana Bloom had been the one responsible for placing Will in his path, and he in Will's. There was no better place to stake his claim over Will once and for all and to heal the wounds of the past.

Will was still dressed in what amounted to rags and Hannibal made a note to purchase a new wardrobe for him as soon as possible. Although they would not be able to remain in Baltimore for long, with so many disappearances occurring too close to Hannibal to be above suspicion, there was a least a short time to prepare. He did not look so very different now to the man he had been in life; he would be able to decimate his patient roster quite merrily before they left, probably to the old world of his youth.

He felt no guilt whatsoever in taking command of the bedroom, tearing the worn out clothes from Will's body, reveling in his increased strength and vigour, feeling a sense of ownership over the man beneath him. Everything came more easily now than it ever had before. Will stared at him, wearily, with sunken eyes.

Hannibal smashed a photo of Alana's parents that had been sitting quietly on the nightstand and took a shard of the glass out. He ran its sharp edge over his tongue and bottom lip and let the torrent of blood that burst out fall into Will's mouth, seeking to reawaken his sense with the taste. The effect was even better than he intended, Will pulling him close and kissing him like a wild thing. He doubted his blood would have the same renewing effect as the blood of their prey but it wasn't so much about feeding as it was about bonding, this sharing he had initiated.

Will pulled the shard from his fingers and slashed the palm of his hand. He pressed the wound to Hannibal's mouth for him to taste, the blood forming a quaint oval print on his lower face.

"Would we have ended up here," Will asked, his voice heavy with lust, "if we were not what we are?"

"Without question," Hannibal replied, firmly, and flipped him onto his stomach.

With a slow arch of his back, Will raised onto his haunches, opening himself out to Hannibal's dark eyes, promising everything. "You were hunting me all along."

"More subtly that you hunted me." He silenced any response by diving into Will with his tongue, gripping onto his thighs so hard he was bursting veins beneath the skin. The moan his assault produced went right down his spine and stabbed deep in his belly. If their union the other night was to pledge a new life to Abigail, this was a more personal pledge; to each other. Ashes to ashes, in sickness and in health, dust to dust, for better or for worse.

He thought of Alana, sweet Alana, whose perfume still lingered on every surface of the room, and whose blood was still heavy in his stomach. Hannibal offered a silent prayer of thanks to her as he replaced his tongue with his fingers.

"Nnn, no. Make it hurt," Will gasped. "We are made for pain. I want it."

Almost giddy with his passion and overwhelmed by newly released feelings of a depth he had rarely known before, Hannibal rested his cheek against Will's back as he roughly pushed his hardness in place of his fingers. "My love," he breathed, and raked his fingernails down Will's sides, happily drawing blood, lost in the passion and yearning to be forever closer.

Hannibal did as Will commanded, allowing himself to be as free and wild as he wanted to be, covering his pale skin in bites and bruises that made Will groan in that special way that touched him deeply. He took him hard but not rudely, making sure to caress as well as hurt him, sharing his very great pleasure.

When he turned Will over and seated himself again within him, laying chest to chest, limbs in a tangle, foreheads pressed together, that strange spark of magic that had taken him to another plain of existence entirely in their last coupling returned. It was something in Will's power, he thought, to share what he was feeling with him, thus magnifying his own experience into something far greater, like an orchestra swelling towards the climax of an exquisite melody. Truly unique and beautiful. It was like a light shining down on them and all the brutality of their true natures disappeared into a moment of calm and blissful connection. Hannibal stared into Will's crystalline blue eyes and let the feeling wash over him, into a heady peak that seemed to last and last.

Will trembled in his arms but appeared energised and strengthened by the exchange. He wrapped one arm around Hannibal's back and clung on tightly, the other hand sliding into Hannibal's hair at the nape of his neck, directing him into a more gentle kiss than before.

They lay together in a contented tangle for some time, untroubled by the cold or the absence of light, needing neither to exist any longer. All the wounds inflicted in their passion healed and faded and they were reborn, two vampires, contented in togetherness, with a whole world of blood and death awaiting them.

"Let's go home to Abigail," Hannibal whispered, eventually. "She will be missing us."

The smile that Will gave in response was the truest and most carefree expression he'd ever made.

"Yes. Let's," he agreed.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!